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BEYOND THE UFO HORIZON

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ON A DARK September night, Barney and Betty Hill saw something in the sky; and what they saw changed their lives forever. If it was what they came to believe it was, that is understandable, for they had an experience which few if any mortals have been privileged to have: an encounter with beings from another part of the universe. But even if no such encounter took place, the fact remains that their lives were changed, and that fact is central to any understanding of their experience.

It is nearly forty years since Dr Simon and the Hills mutually agreed to terminate their hypnosis sessions. During that period, the crucial question, the only one that really matters - *did the encounter take place as ostensibly recalled?* - has been left dangling, unanswered. With so much hanging on the answer to that question, it is astonishing that greater efforts have not been made to answer it.

It is particularly astonishing that there has been no in-depth reappraisal of the case. Fuller, who authored the only full-length account of the matter, was a journalist: though we have no reason to question his integrity, and though his book is a creditable piece of reporting and so far as I am aware contains no major errors, it would be reassuring to have a second opinion in so serious a matter. Naturally the Hills' story is narrated, and to a degree commented on, in such publications as Clark's *UFO Encyclopedia*: but we lack a counter-investigation of the story, filling the gaps that Fuller skipped over, perhaps because he did not even notice them, and to provide answers to the questions he left hanging, perhaps because he was in no position to answer them.

Perhaps our best starting-point is this comment from his book:

Short of acceptance of the whole experience as reality, which contradictory evidence prevented the doctor from doing, the best alternative lay in the dream hypothesis. (Fuller 1966: 274)

That hypothesis, though it has never been formally set out, is to the effect that Betty's dreams were a fantasy: a fantasy which she communicated to Barney as the result of recounting her dreams to him, and which both would subsequently recall in the course of their hypnosis sessions.

For those who cannot bring themselves to accept the hypnotically recalled scenario as fact, the dream hypothesis remains the option of choice. However, this alternative explanation has its own shortcomings: not least, that the part played by fantasy in human behaviour, though it has been extensively explored, has yet to be precisely formulated. It is common acceptance that we are all influenced by myths, archetypes and stereotypes derived on the one hand from our cultural environment, on the other from our personal experience. But the processes are yet uncharted whereby the paths we tread through this labyrinth can, when the circumstances are appropriate, lead us to all kinds of anomalous experience ranging from simple misperception - an advertising blimp becomes an alien spacecraft - to total fabrication - the figure of an Old Hag enters our bedroom and seats herself upon our body.

The first step towards evaluating the explanatory power of the dream hypothesis for the Hills' encounter is,

therefore, to set it in the wider context of anomalous experience. It needs to be considered in the light of other experiences where it seems possible that fantasy plays a crucial part.

This will not, of course, enable us to make an absolute yes-or-no judgment on the Hills' encounter. But it will enable us to gauge the probability that this is what set the process in motion. We shall then need to consider how such fantasy may be communicated from one person to another, and then, how it can re-emerge as ostensibly true memory.

Betty's nightmares

Some ten days after their encounter - approximately 29 September to 3 October 1961 - Betty Hill experienced a series of remarkably detailed dreams which, when the disparate elements are brought together, rearranged and ordered, form a sequential narrative. This narrative offers a complete and coherent story in which the initial sighting, which the couple consciously recalled, leads seamlessly into related events of which they have no conscious memory whatever.

What makes the Hills' experience so remarkable - unique, it may be - is the fact that more than three years later, under hypnosis, not only would Betty recall events which match her dreams in detail, but Barney would echo her account. Understandably this would lead many to the conclusion that both the dreams and the hypnotic recall were literally narrating events that had actually taken place.

Could this be so? The interpretation of dreams had a long history before Freud used it as the title for his landmark book. Dreams requiring de-coding are notable incidents in the Judeo-Christian Bible: the Roman statesman Cicero wrote a book

about divination, and dream books are as popular today as they were with Victorian housemaids. But invariably we find it taken for granted that dreams are not to be taken at face value. They must be interpreted: you must read your Freud - or your gipsy astrologer - to learn what those extraordinary happenings *really* signify.

None the less Fuller asserts 'It is not uncommon for dreams resulting from an experience of shock to be literal ; i.e. a complete re-enactment, so to speak, of an event that actually took place'. (Fuller 1966: 333) He provides no authority for this statement, which I suspect is open to question: I have found no confirmation of it in the literature. The general opinion, as expressed by John Antrobus of the City College of New York, is that 'dreaming refers to a mixture of thought and emotional properties that are rare in normal waking, but common in sleep'. (Antrobus 1993: 98)

Though I am not aware of any case in the literature of dreams, inquiry among my acquaintance elicited a case which at first seems to confirm Fuller's assertion. A car passenger was involved in an accident in which a pedestrian was killed. Traumatized by the event, she had repeated dreams of it, night after night. She said the dream exactly matched the event.

However, there is a significant difference between this and the Hill case: this lady had *consciously* experienced her traumatising event, and retained *conscious* memories of it. The Hills, on the other hand, even if they lived their encounter on a conscious level - it is difficult if not impossible to learn from Fuller's account what state of mind the couple were in while participating in their adventure - they certainly had no conscious memories of it.

So even if we give Fuller the benefit of the doubt and accept as possible that Betty might be one of the exceptional people whose dreams are indeed a re-living of actual experience - or, at any rate, that on this occasion they were so - we must, because this is so exceptional an occurrence, consider the alternative as no less possible: that her dreams were - as most dreams are - a fantasy, making more or less use of veridical events, combined with material obtained, consciously or unconsciously, from every conceivable source to which she had ever been exposed, whether derived from her

personal experience, from her cultural milieu or from her imagination.

The only scenario

There is one aspect of Betty's dreams which is easily overlooked: veridical or not, the dreams made a highly significant difference to the couple's situation. *Before* the dreams, their experience comprised a UFO sighting followed by a period for which they are amnesic. *After* the dreams, the Hills are provided with a possible account of what happened during that amnesic period. Moreover, it is an account which is remarkably detailed, remarkably coherent. We do not know whether Barney played any part in helping Betty organise the scattered incidents of her dream-content into a smooth-running narrative, but in the light of his dismissal of the dreams, it seems likely that it was Betty alone who arranged the disordered tableaux into a rational sequence. As set down by Betty, it is a complete and generally plausible story. Furthermore, it is a story that is rooted in known fact - or, at any rate, in the incidents related to the initial sighting and Barney's panic, details which the Hills regard as fact; so they can be forgiven for speculating whether the dream-narrative, containing both the initial sighting and the subsequent abduction, might be *all* fact.

Betty does not mention her dreams to their first interviewer Walter Webb on 21 October 1961, and this is perhaps understandable in view of the fact that at this stage, though the Hills recognise a degree of amnesia in the course of their journey, they have not yet been confronted with the challenge of the two-plus hours of missing time. Though Betty found the dreams deeply disturbing, it is possible that she at this stage regards them simply as fantasy, without it even crossing her mind that they might bear some relation to real experience. Even if she does initially have any such thoughts, she might seek to put them out of her mind when Barney dismisses her dreams as nonsense.

The 'missing time' mystery emerges a month later, in the course of the meeting with Hohmann, Jackson and MacDonald on 25 November 1961. At once the amnesia is perceived to be greatly more significant. Betty says 'This was the first time I began to wonder if they were *more* than just dreams. Then I really got upset over my dreams.' It is at this point that

hypnosis is suggested to aid recall, and both Hills favour the suggestion. Barney hopes that hypnosis 'might clear up Betty and her nonsense about her dreams'. (Fuller 1966: 47-48) In fact, however, the hypnosis proposal is not taken up at this point; on 25 March 1962 they decide against it, and the possibility will not be raised again until a year and a half later.

None the less, it remains a fact that, irrespective of Betty's uncertainty about her dreams, and whether or not Barney regards them as 'nonsense', they provide the couple with a possible scenario for what is otherwise a gap in their lives. *Even if they do not accept it as a true account, it is the only account they have.* It is inconceivable, therefore, that it is not in the back of their minds - to say the least - throughout the year and a half which elapses before hypnosis is undertaken, a period in which *no alternative explanation is ever seriously considered because there is no other account to consider.*

Even if, in the light of Barney's dismissive attitude, neither of them ever actually speaks of the dreams to the other, both of them must retain an awareness of the dream-story, if only as a terrifying scenario they would prefer to discard if only a better one were available.

Fact or fantasy ?

The question, whether those dreams were a factual replay of real events or a fantasy in which fact and fiction are inextricably jumbled, is therefore a crucial one: but in the absence of any independent evidence or corroborative testimony it is a question which it is well nigh impossible to resolve. All we have by way of confirmation are a pair of subjective accounts, not consciously recalled but elicited under hypnosis. In support of their being true memories, there is the fact that both witnesses tell substantially the same story: against it, there is the fantastic nature of that story and the lack of any external corroboration.

However, these very facts place the Hills' experience in the same state of existential instability as a wide variety of other claimed anomalous experiences which, because they lie beyond the UFO horizon, are rarely perceived as relevant to UFO issues. Thousands of individuals have laid claims to have met the Virgin Mary, mother of the Christians' Jesus: thousands more have claimed to be, or

been diagnosed as being, possessed by evil spirits. Millions believe they communicate with spirits of the dead, and ghost stories are as widely reported today as they were two thousand years ago. Many of those who were burned as witches in the 15th through the 17th century believed they flew through the air to participate in sabbats: similar journeys are claimed by shamans in primitive cultures who travel to otherworldly destinations to consult with tribal deities.

By and large, these experiences are not today supposed to be literal accounts of physical events: alternative scenarios have been proposed which are generally preferred by behavioural scientists. At the same time, they are accepted as literal fact by those who perceive them as being countenanced by a particular belief-system. Some years ago I attended a conference in Basel where a speaker told us about a case of diabolical possession in which he had been involved: to my astonishment, I suddenly realised that the speaker, though a university professor, believed implicitly in the literal reality of a possessing demon. Those who communicate with the dead round the séance table are not always the credulous victims of exploiting charlatans: many of them are intelligent, educated people who believe they have sound and rational grounds for believing that they are truly doing what they think they are doing.

So an examination of other marginal experiences by no means implies that we are seeking to place the Hills' experience in a category occupied exclusively by fantasy: we must be prepared to accept that any of these claims may tip either way, this way into fact or that way into fiction. But at least, in the absence of either confirmation or rebuttal of the Hills' abduction scenario, a look at some of these other limbo cases may enable us to take a broader approach to their particular experience.

Case 1: Glenda and the spacewoman

In 1976 a 17-year old girl from Dagenham, near London, England, told investigators of a series of strange experiences culminating in a cigar-shaped UFO which followed her along a city street. She revealed that five years earlier she had come home from school one afternoon, gone upstairs to her room, only to be joined by a spacewoman who walked in through the closed door, sat

beside her on her bed and talked with her for an hour or so. Ever since then, the spacewoman had been a sort of companion, counsellor and friend - generally unseen, but always felt.

Glenda had no doubt of her reality: I have the drawing she made of her visitor. Did Glenda's spacewoman exist? Probably not in the literal, physical sense. Yet, paradoxically, in another sense she *did* exist: for beyond question she played a significant role in Glenda's adolescent life, over a period of some five years. (Evans 1984: 15 et seq) That is to say, the fact of an entity's non-existence must not be allowed to stand in the way of its ability to exert a very real influence on the individual who supposes her/himself to have encountered it.

At the time, I was asked to provide an explanation for Glenda's experiences, and I failed, utterly. I did not believe that a spacewoman had visited Glenda, but neither could I say what had happened to her to make her think she had been visited. Then a year later I met a French girl who claimed to have met the Virgin Mary, and this not only provided additional incentive to find an explanation, but also suggested which way to look for one.

Case 2: Blandine and the Virgin Mary

In 1981, Blandine Piegeay was a 14-year old Catholic French schoolgirl. One day, walking to school, she met an angel who told her she would shortly receive a visit from Mary, the mother of Jesus, who died some 19 centuries ago: and two days later she did indeed experience the first of some fifty encounters. Every Saturday morning - for the Queen of Heaven agreed with Blandine that a weekend day would be more suitable than a study-disruptive schoolday - Mary would descend from Heaven and visit with Blandine in the family kitchen. No one else saw her, though her father claimed once to have heard her.

Her parish priest was sceptical, but thousands of pilgrims beat a path to her door: she was featured on television, a nine days' wonder. Today she is married, with a child, her adventure all but forgotten. But Blandine insists: 'I know my apparitions were true. Why would I have invented them?' (Evans 1987: 9)

That question is the key to understanding her experience. Instead of asking: Why would the Virgin Mary come

down from Heaven to meet with Blandine and tell her she eats too many bonbons? we should ask, Why would Blandine claim such an experience?

The conclusion must be that Blandine had a psychological need for such an encounter. She *needed* someone - and not just anyone, an authority figure whose word she could accept - to tell her she was important, she mattered. If not to her fellow-pupils or her teachers, then to the Queen of Heaven. Crudely put, the Virgin Mary came in answer to Blandine's identity crisis.

Looking back to Glenda's spacewoman, hindsight suggests that her manifestation took place for much the same reason. The 12-year old English girl, like the 14-year old French girl, needed an authority-figure to whom she could look for guidance, counsel, reassurance. Not for her, though, the Virgin Mary of Catholic Blandine: instead, a stereotype from her own cultural milieu, an extraterrestrial entity.

Each such encounter is both stereotyped and custom-made. The content is personal - each individual has his or her own agenda: but the format is largely cultural. In the history of Marian apparitions, the pattern has become almost as ritualised as a Japanese stage performance, with stock episodes - the apparition of the authority-figure in some isolated place, the conventionalised appearance, the formularised message, the healings limited to a certain range of ailments, the manifestation of a sacred spring. In similar fashion, stories of abduction by aliens have become stylised and run to a pattern with a greater or lesser degree of conformity. (Bullard 1987: Brookesmith 1998)

This conformity has been seen as evidence both for and against the authenticity of the claimed experience. On the one hand, the fact that such narratives possess so many similarities, including very specific details with which an 'innocent' experiencer could not reasonably be expected to be acquainted, has been taken as supportive of the view that the event was genuinely experienced. And indeed it is not easy to explain how such details could have been acquired unless the individual had been exposed to other experiencers' accounts. On the other hand, the inclusion of such details - if it can be shown that they could have been acquired in the course of the individual's

casual daily reading or TV viewing - could point to copycat replication. It is important to recognise that this would almost certainly have been an unconscious process: the acquisition of the details, and their assimilation into a personal experience, could perfectly well have taken place on a subconscious level - and indeed, more likely than not.

This issue remains unresolved, and those who make out the case for the 'abductions-are-real' case seem to have as strong a hand as those who hold an 'abductions-are-fantasy' view. This is why we must look beyond the immediate issue, the stylised pattern, to the individual encounter and the personal need to which it responds. For then we find that each case is both one of a class and one of a kind: both ubiquitous and unique.

Researcher Scott Rogo, investigating the 1953 Tujunga Canyon abductions, went so far as to suggest:

Each time an abduction experience is uncovered, a psychological inquiry into the life of the witness should indicate that he or she was undergoing a life-crisis at the time or was recovering from a psychological trauma. (Rogo 1980: 239)

The objection can be made that the Hills' encounter, being the first to be widely publicised, can hardly have been conforming to a pattern: if anything, it *set* the pattern. But this is to miss the point. If subsequent abductions have tended to follow in the same mould, it is because the Hills' experience was an acceptable model: it embodies elements to which later protagonists respond. Their story may seem to have been the first of its kind: but it is none the less a stereotype.

Case 3: Barbara and the Operators

The wisdom of Scott Rogo's admonition to look before as well as after is demonstrated tellingly in the book in which Barbara O'Brien, an American professional woman, records her encounters with otherworldly beings. (O'Brien 1958) Following on personal problems, both domestic and at work, she begins to hallucinate a number of entities, who identify themselves as denizens of some kind of parallel world which interacts with ours. Though on one level she is aware that they are hallucinatory,

they are at the same time totally real to her. She permits them to persuade her to leave home and work, and wander for many months, living in two worlds at once - the real world where she has to continue living as best she can, and this strange other level of reality. Apart from occasional breakdowns, she manages pretty well: and eventually she succeeds in resolving her situation.

What makes her story so remarkable is her ability to subsequently analyse it and to offer a diagnosis of what happened to her. In retrospect, she realises that, triggered by her psychological crisis, her unconscious had taken control of her life and substituted its own unreal drama for the real play of events:

The unconscious stages a play: the conscious mind is permitted to remain, an audience of one, watching a drama on which it cannot walk out.... As you sit watching your Martian, it is your unconscious mind which is flashing the picture before your eyes.. more than this, it is blowing a fog of hypnosis over your conscious mind so that consciously you are convinced that the hallucinations you see and hear, and the delusions that accompany the hallucinations, are real. (O'Brien 1958: 5)

What happened to Barbara could be what happened to Glenda and Blandine: the illusion they take for reality is a presentation staged by their subconscious minds.

Normally, the subconscious sits there in the background, letting our conscious self get on with things. But when the need arises, it steps in and makes its presence felt.

When that happens, the individual starts to function on two separate levels of reality. Sometimes for a single never-to-be-repeated occasion, sometimes over a long period. So Glenda, Blandine and Barbara, each in her own way, function in this way: retaining their ability to live on the plane of everyday existence, but at the same time intermittently maintaining their otherworldly contact. (For a fuller presentation of these ideas, see Evans 1989)

It is one thing to formulate a theory, quite another to apply it in practice. In November 1980 there was a notable case in England involving a police officer who,

on patrol alone at night, encountered a UFO. Subsequently, under hypnosis, he recounted a horrific, dreamlike abduction experience. When I diffidently suggested that Alan Godfrey's abduction might be a fantasy triggered by psychological factors, he was indignant, rejecting my reading of his adventure, feeling I was accusing him of mental instability. Since then, though, he himself has come to question the physical reality of his experience: 'It *seemed* real but it might have been a dream'. (Randles 1988: 90) Investigator Jenny Randles writes:

Godfrey is commendably honest, pointing out that he read UFO stories between the sighting and the hypnosis sessions months later. He acknowledges this could have coloured what he said in an altered state, which might therefore be open to other interpretations. While nobody can prove what happened one way or another, if the witness himself is unsure of the objective reality of the abduction phase of his story, we must be wary of forming earth-shattering opinions about extraterrestrial life. (Hough and Randles 1991: 189)

And she pertinently observes:

Of course, if it *was* a dream, the question is why it was so similar to everyone else's dream of abduction. (Randles 1988: 90)

Which brings us back to the Hills...

Case 4: Madeleine and Jesus

When popular fantasy author Whitley Strieber published his autobiographical *Communion*, the press release issued with it declared 'I was interviewed by three psychologists and three psychiatrists, given a battery of tests... and found to fall within the normal range in all respects' and carried an endorsement from the Director of Research at New York State Psychiatric Institute which stated 'I see no evidence of an anxiety state, mind disorder or personality disorder'. (Strieber 1987: 2) We can only assume that none of these highly qualified persons had considered it relevant to their examination to glance at Mr Strieber's own non-fiction autobiographical writings. If so they would have come across his description of the security arrangements at the house where the alleged abduction took place,

which by any standards approached paranoia - though if his story is as true as his dust-jacket says it is, perhaps in the light of what was to occur paranoia was justified. They would have read of his erroneous belief that he was present at the 1966 Charles Whitman massacre at the University of Texas at Austin when he undoubtedly was elsewhere, (Conroy 1989: 120) of his prolonged amnesia in the course of a visit to Italy, and many other such incidents. Even from what he chooses to reveal about himself, we can see that 'disordered' would be a mild description of both his mind and his personality both at the time of his experience and, indeed, recurrently throughout his life. (Strieber 1987 (1))

Similarly, abduction researcher Budd Hopkins assures us, with regard to the abductees whose stories he recounts:

Three psychiatrists and two psychologists have conducted hypnotic regression sessions over the years with a number of possible UFO abductees. Two other psychiatrists have interviewed our subjects... None of these psychological professionals have presented to me, even tentatively, a psychological theory that might explain these bizarre accounts. (Hopkins 1987: 25)

This is a truly astonishing assertion: one can only suppose that the psychologists in question had never taken the time to study the findings of their eminent predecessors. Simply among the best known, we can find similar behaviours described by Freud, Jung and Janet. Pierre Janet, above all, laid the scientific foundations for such studies, based on his observations of hysterical patients at La Salpêtrière, Paris. His patient Madeleine, a gifted and articulate lady, is convinced she makes periodic visits with Jesus - a spiritual activity she describes as 'very rich and very beautiful', using language which verges on the erotic:

No, the state I enter isn't sleep: sleep is a kind of suspension of the life of the spirit, whereas mine is just the opposite.... my spirit and my heart soar over immense horizons into which they plunge and lose themselves in delight... no earthly pleasure can be compared to it! .. I am united to God and he to me! (Janet 1926, volume 1: 68 et seq)

There is no doubt in Madeleine's mind that her meetings with Jesus are real, nor that he will, one fine day, fetch her to live with him permanently in Heaven. She speaks of her 'life in common' with Jesus, and Janet describes it as 'the life of a couple, even, dare I say it, a *ménage*'. While he had no doubt that none of this had any basis in reality, he sought to examine the process whereby she had come to make the claim, and how she was able to live simultaneously on two levels of reality - aware, indeed, how remote one was from the other, yet unsurprised at her ability to pass easily to and fro between them. In so doing, he laid the foundations of the studies upon which we, today, are building. Siegel's exploration of hallucination, (Siegel 1992) Hufford's study of 'bedroom visitors' (Hufford 1982) and Schatzmann's account of his patient Ruth (Schatzmann 1980) all show that under appropriate circumstances sane, healthy people can have encounter experiences which are so vividly veridical that, if only for the time being, the witness sees no need to attempt any reality-testing, and unquestioningly accepts them as actual.

Case 5: The New Zealander and the flying saucer photo

The process of self-delusion is fascinatingly devious, as this trivial incident demonstrates. One day a gentleman from New Zealand, a total stranger, visited me on business. The conversation touched upon flying saucers, whereupon the visitor stated that he himself had not only seen but photographed one. When I expressed suitable amazement, he produced a glossy print and explained how, when and where he had taken it - on a given date, at a given place in his own country. However, I recognised it as a photo taken at an earlier date, in the United States, by an American photographer.

Beyond question, the man was lying : but was he lying *knowingly*? My guess is that my visitor had somehow acquired a glossy print of the photo, and from wishing he had taken it he had come to convince himself that he was indeed the photographer. There must have been some part of him that knew perfectly well he had *not* taken that photograph: but, driven by whatever motivation, he chose to maintain the make-believe which to him

was belief.

While we have no reason to suppose that the Hills had any wish to see a UFO, still less to meet its occupants, it is possible to argue that Barney's aggressive hostility to UFOs had its roots in a subconscious desire to do so. But this is pure speculation. What this anecdote reminds us, though, is that there are people whose unspoken motives can lead them to do and say things which consciously they would indignantly reject. Once again, only a detailed examination would disclose what motives were driving my visitor.

Case 6: Allan Kirk and his otherworldly life

A notable feature of O'Brien's experience is the way she accepts her otherworldly Operators into her life: their fantastic nature seems, at the time, something she can take in her stride. This seems to be generally true of those who meet with aliens. A Canadian lady, who described to me how aliens visited her every evening in her kitchen to report on the day's progress in helping the Mexican government perfect a cure for cancer, was well-dressed, articulate, seemingly normal in every other respect.

American psychoanalyst Robert Lindner had the opportunity to study at first-hand an extreme case of living on two different levels. (Lindner 1954) Not long after World War Two he had a patient referred to him, a physicist engaged in highly classified government research, whose psychological condition was affecting the quality of his work.

What Lindner gradually unravelled was that Allen Kirk, aside from being a physicist on Earth, had been aware since childhood that he was also a prince on a distant planet, to which he would return on almost a daily basis. His written account of his other existence comprised some 14,000 pages, accompanied by hundreds of drawings, maps and sketches.

The creation of imaginary worlds is nothing new: apart from the many utopian writers who have imagined alternative civilisations, there are such people as the Brontë sisters whose fantasy creations went beyond literary invention to play a role similar to those imaginary playmates with which many children enrich their childhoods. But Kirk's world surpassed these not only in the detail of the fantasy, but also the intensity with which he

believed in it. He himself told Lindner:

How can I explain this to you? One moment I was just a scientist, bending over a drawing board in the middle of an American desert; the next moment I was Kirk Allen, Lord of a planet in an interplanetary empire in a distant universe, garbed in the robe of his exalted office, rising from the carved desk he had been sitting at, walking towards a secret room in his palace, going over to a filing cabinet, extracting an envelope of photographs, studying the photographs with intense concentration.

It was over in a matter of minutes, and I was again at the drawing-board - the self you see here. But I knew the experience was real, and to prove it I now had a vivid recollection of the photographs, could see them as clearly as if they were still in my hands... (Lindner 1954: 183-184)

What puzzled Lindner was this:

The chief difficulty was that he regarded himself as completely normal, was thoroughly convinced of the reality of all that he experienced, and could not comprehend its significance in terms of his sanity. (Lindner 1954: 185)

In all such cases, if we look for a simple, blanket explanation, we shall almost certainly miss the point. Even if the fantasy itself falls into a specific category - the Münchhausen syndrome, (Schnabel 1993: 26) say, which drives those it afflicts to claim false identities and experiences, or the Jerusalem syndrome (Sieveking 1999: 21) whose victims come to believe they are chosen to give an apocalyptic message to the world - even then, we have to ask why that particular individual developed the syndrome. Putting people into pigeonholes is a neat way of sorting them out, but more important is to find out what got them that way in the first place. Lindner was able to trace Kirk's fantasy back to childhood problems: the fantasy, for all its stereotypical nature, was custom-made for his personal needs.

Case 7: Christi Dennis's confession

Particularly revealing in this context is an incident which occurred at one of the

Rocky Mountain reunions which Professor Leo Sprinkle holds every year at the University of Wyoming at Laramie. Most attendees are abductees and contactees, who get together to compare notes and share experiences in a supportive environment. Experiencers tell their stories, and enjoy counselling from Leo and his colleagues and the sympathetic support of others like themselves.

In May 1981, one of the speakers was a college student, housewife and mother from Arizona named Christi Dennis. She told how she been confined to bed after an accident, practising spiritual exercises such as OBEs. One day she suddenly had the impression there were otherworldly entities in her room. She found she could talk with them. Subsequently she was transferred to their planet, where she met a female entity over 7 feet tall who gave her instruction.

Christi provided a detailed and coherent account of her experiences. She described her room which contained, among other things, a television set where she could watch TV from earth from any period in time, and much other sophisticated gadgetry. Her presentation was lucid, sensible, impressive. (Proceedings of the Rocky Mountain Conference on UFO Investigation 1981: 104) She was welcomed by the delegates, most of whom had passed through similar experiences, as one of themselves.

The following year, she wrote a letter to Sprinkle, which he in turn communicated to the conferencers, in which she confessed:

I am not a contactee. I have never had an extra-terrestrial experience! The stories I have told and the book I have written are nothing more than fair science fiction. (*Proceedings of the Rocky Mountain Conference on UFO Investigation 1982: 105*)

Her letter made it clear this was no crude, sensation-seeking hoax; rather, it was the outcome of some spiritual crisis. Christi had projected herself into this imaginary scenario as a way of working her way out of her personal psychological predicament. The abduction process provided her with a ready-made scenario onto which she could project her individual concerns.

Apart from vividly demonstrating the

difficulty of distinguishing between a true and a false abduction experience, the Dennis case demonstrates the force - even the therapeutic value - of the authorised abduction myth. For her, as for O'Brien, the myth provided an existential framework for her personal situation. It could be reasonably suggested that, just as a medicine contains ingredients which the human biological system may from time to time require, so the encounter myth may contain elements for which the individual may have a psychological need. In the cases of Glenda and Blandine, that need was met relatively simply by the ostensible meeting and subsequent dialogues with a suitable authority-figure: in the cases of O'Brien and Dennis, more mature persons with more complex psychological needs, the psychodrama was more elaborate, but the process was the same. As to why it took the form it did, we are back with Scott Rogo's requirement for a before-the-event analysis. As to whether this has any bearing on the Hill case, this must remain an open question.

Case 8: The New Ager and the aliens

Few books about abductions are as revealing as Betty Hill's own aptly-titled *A common-sense approach to UFOs*. It includes several cautionary tales:

In the mid-1970s, a woman phoned to say she did not know if she was crazy or had been abducted by a UFO. Her problems began when she enrolled in a New Age psychic development class. They would lie on the floor and were put into a light trance. They were 'connected' to different kinds of UFOs... Over a period of time she began to think her fantasies were real.

She sought out hypnotists. Every hypnotist gave her a different abduction. She became fearful as she believed the 'aliens' were watching her through her windows, unlocking her doors, coming in and giving her injections. She became suicidal. She was under psychiatrists for fifteen years. She had all kinds of delusions. She knew she was an alien who was forced to move to this planet.

Under hypnosis, it emerged that as a child she had been mistreated by her family: her grandmother continually hit her, and her mother followed the example. The resulting

trauma was transferred to the aliens. She preferred to believe her anxieties were the result of UFO contacts, rather than the cruel treatment by her grandmother and mother. (Hill 1995: 75)

In connection with the Hill case, the possibility of trauma stemming from the fact of their mixed marriage has inevitably been raised, and generally dismissed. Probably correctly: there seems little doubt that their marriage - a second marriage for each of them - was a very successful one. But we do not know the circumstances under which their previous marriages broke up, and the possibility of trauma resulting from those circumstances cannot be entirely dismissed. Without going so far as to trace a cause-and-effect process along the lines of the case just cited, we should bear in mind that trauma may have been lying dormant in the subconscious of one or both of the Hills, and that they could have been transferred to the aliens in a similar way, as a contributory if not a causative factor.

Case 9: The party guest and the lost doll

The trigger for belief need be nothing more than simple suggestion, though that probably implies a suitably susceptible recipient. At a party at Betty's house, a hypnotist offered to uncover his guests' UFO abductions:

They all laughed, for they knew they were never abducted. He requested a volunteer: a middle-aged woman volunteered. He put her into a light trance and began to question her. To our amazement, she told how she had been taken on board a UFO, made pregnant, came home and later gave birth to a 'big, fat baby girl'. She gave it a name.

Six months later the UFO came back and took the baby with them.

None of this was true. She lived in the same neighbourhood all her life: no pregnancy, no birth, no police looking for the body of a missing baby. So why had she told this tale?

One day, we were looking through her old family albums. Suddenly we saw a picture of her about the age of five, sitting on the front steps. What was she holding? A big, fat baby doll. Name? The same as the one she had used in her hypnosis. Where was this

doll? She did not know, for it disappeared one day and she was never able to find it.

Finally, the solution to the tales she told under hypnosis was found. She took a real experience and turned it into a UFO abduction, while in a trance. (Hill 1995: 77)

Yet again, only a study of the experiencer's past life could reveal the roots of the experience. But for the accident of the family album, Betty's question, 'So why had she told this tale?' might have remained forever unanswered. While we have no reason to suppose that a glimpse of the Hills' family snaps would have been equally revelatory, such a possibility cannot be excluded.

Case 10: The abductee and the demons

Hypnosis is often fingered as the cause of fantasy and fabrication: but other and more down-to-earth factors can induce an altered state of consciousness. Fasting undoubtedly underlay many visionary experiences among religious people of the middle ages. For example, the 7th century hermit Guthlac of Croyland left a sufficiently detailed account of his personal life for researchers to deduce that he probably suffered from protein and vitamin B deficiency, among whose likely consequences might be hallucinatory states: which could explain why he was continually troubled with horrifying visions of demons. (Kroll and Bachrach 1982) In the sixteenth century, a similar factor led to outbreaks of convent hysteria, in which cloistered nuns would fancy themselves possessed by demons, causing them to indulge in a variety of behaviours ranging from outbursts of blasphemous language, obscene gestures and orgasmic convulsions: the more open-minded doctors of the day traced it to the effects of diet and fasting, and of the cloistered and celibate lifestyle. (Wier 1960)

Taking drugs, or not taking drugs, can have similar effects, as illustrated by another of Betty's cases:

A woman told her doctor she thought she had been abducted by aliens. He referred her to me: I suggested she should be tested for her lithium level. She was given lithium treatment and became normal again.

Then she said she didn't need lithium any more. She ran naked

round the garden, claiming the aliens were everywhere. She told me demons were in her basement, while the UFO people were in the back yard trying to get into the house to save her. The demons prevented them doing this. She started destroying the house, finally setting fire to it. She was sent off to a mental home while her husband faced a huge bill for the damage.

[In the end Betty convinced her to face facts] I said: 'UFOs are real, but the aliens stay on board their crafts - remember you see them only when your lithium level is down'. (Hill 1995: 62)

While it would be naïve to suggest that the Hills ate something in the Colebrook restaurant which triggered a shared fantasy, Betty's common-sense diagnosis of this case reminds us not to ignore the possibility that a factor as mundane as body chemistry can have otherworldly consequences.

Case 11: Quintero and the thunderstorm

Clearly, there are a wide variety of circumstances in which people will fantasise. Regrettably, fantasy is often associated with hallucination; and to many psychologists, especially in America, hallucination is perceived as an indication of a pathological condition. If you see a ghost or the Virgin Mary or an alien visitor, you are hallucinating; and if you are hallucinating, you must be mentally afflicted.

But what constitutes mental affliction? Studies by Israeli scientist Sulman show that 'weather-sensitive patients encompass about 30% of any population', and other studies show that about 5% of the population are so sensitive to climate that an altered state of consciousness can be induced. (Sulman 1980)

Consider, in the light of these findings, the case of Colombian cowman Anibal Quintero:

In 1976 Quintero told investigators how a luminous egg-shaped vessel landed close to him near his cowsheds. A number of people emerged, including three long-haired women. Though he knocked four or five down, they overcame him and took him into their spacecraft.

When he came to, he found

himself being massaged by the three females. They were naked, and behaved so provocatively that he started caressing one; she responded enthusiastically, and in no time they were making love. He described her as very hairy, with short legs, but very attractive, even if she communicated like a dog barking.

Afterwards he was given an injection and everything went black. He woke to find himself lying on the grass, while dawn was breaking. (Bowen 1977: 48)

However, there is an interesting additional aspect:

His wife told the investigators Anibal had come home from work that evening in an unusual state, throwing himself into a hammock where he had fallen asleep. Shortly after, a violent thunderstorm occurred. Quintero woke, feeling queer, as though something was about to happen to him, and dashed out of the house. When the storm eased off, he walked towards the cowsheds, feeling that he was 'controlled by some inexplicable external force'.

This behaviour makes no sense if what occurred was indeed a surprise visit by real aliens. On the other hand, it could be very relevant if Quintero was one of those who are strongly affected by meteorological conditions. If this was the case, the oncoming storm could have triggered an alternate state, in which he hallucinated the spaceship fantasy.

Case 12: Maureen and the broken date

While there is virtually no independent, external evidence for abductions taking place, there is evidence that some alleged abductions did *not* take place. The classic case is that of 37-year old Australian housewife Maureen Puddy:

On 3 July 1972 she had a UFO sighting while driving home from visiting her son in hospital - that is to say, at a time when we may reasonably suppose that she was undergoing personal stress. Further odd experiences followed, then in February 1973 she alerted two prominent ufologists, Paul Norman and Judith Magee, that she had a rendezvous with the aliens. At the

location, Magee and Norman joined her inside her car. She saw an alien figure, outside, beckoning, though her companions saw nothing. She then gave a detailed account of being aboard a spacecraft: yet all the time she was sitting right beside them. (Basterfield 1992: 13)

During the witchcraft outbreak of the Middle Ages, sceptical observers would watch a supposed witch while she claimed to be attending a sabbat. (Spina 1523) Back in our own time, nine-year old Gaynor Sunderland was witnessed by her mother, lying on her bed in a deep trance-like sleep: subsequently she described participation in an abduction. Jenny Randles, who investigated, concluded, 'There is every reason to assume that these experiences were not objectively real, but were psychic in nature.' (Randles 1981) Yet there is no reason to question the honesty of the witnesses who claimed these experiences: here again, their ostensible reality was totally convincing to the individual.

The question of communication

Every one of these case histories involves a single individual, without corroboration of any kind. What makes the Hills' case uniquely impressive is that Barney and Betty tell essentially the same story under hypnosis.

One way of looking at this would be to say that it was the Hills' exceptional good fortune that they had each other to provide corroboration: perhaps many if not all of these other experiencers might have found corroboration if their experience had not taken place when they were alone. That is certainly a possibility, though we must bear in mind that there are tens of thousands of single-witness cases for each collective case, and that many collective cases are of questionable authenticity.

Alternatively, we should consider the possibility that the shared quality of the Hills' experience may point equally effectively *against* its being a real experience: that the very fact that Betty's story is corroborated by Barney is an argument *against* its basis in fact. Fuller makes a significant observation when he tells us:

After the first sessions with Barney, Dr Simon began to assume that the illusions and fantasies were his - and

that Betty had absorbed them from him. But with the completion of Betty's second trance, it appeared that the reverse of the doctor's initial assumption might be true. If the total experience were not true, a dream of fantasy initiated by Betty might have been absorbed by Barney, who appeared to be more suggestible. (Fuller 1966: 191)

In fact,

Dr Simon noted that the things Barney experienced in the abduction portion of the incident were in Betty's story. On the other hand, very little of Betty's abduction sequence was included in his story. His recall of being taken through the woods was vague compared to hers. The details of the examination aboard the craft were much more extensive in Betty's story than in his.

Karl Pflock has pointed out that Simon was in error when he gave the impression that everything in Barney's narration can be found in Betty's: "There's a good deal of important material in Barney's recollections that doesn't appear in Betty's". [personal communication] None the less, Betty's narrative was sufficiently richer than Barney's that Simon could arrive at his estimate of the process which probably took place.

The question of contagion in human behaviour is a complex one which has been insufficiently explored. If we knew more about it we would be better able to interpret multiple-witness cases. The phenomenon known as *folie à deux*, though well known, is not well understood: a substantial number of well-attested ghost sightings are multiple in nature, but the mechanism of collective hallucination is as uncertain as the nature of ghosts themselves. The authors of the Society for Psychical Research's landmark study of apparitions were convinced that this could be explained - as could the apparitions themselves - by telepathy, (Gurney, Myers and Podmore 1886) though most researchers today would consider that this explanation is over-simplistic. Be that as it may, there is little doubt that what takes place in such cases is either some form of extra-sensory communication, or some psychological process as yet unidentified which successfully transcends normal modes of

communication. If the matter were better understood, we would find it easier to tease out the process which led from the Hills' experience, first to Betty's dreams, then to their independent recall. As it is, we can only speculate, balancing the probabilities.

As suggested above, some degree of open discussion of Betty's dreams must surely have taken place between herself and Barney, if only for him to reach the conclusion that they were 'nonsense'. It is hard to believe the subject would be dropped, never again to be raised between them throughout the months that followed - months, don't let us forget, when the couple were making repeated excursions into the New Hampshire countryside in search of topographical confirmation of their experience: the need to understand the experience led to the need to substantiate it, and the search for the geographical location was a primary requirement. But even though their efforts were directed at something as down-to-earth as the here or there of the experience, we must bear in mind that *those efforts were directed towards finding the location of events for which there was no evidence outside Betty's dreams*. This is to say that, even if we accept that it was tacitly agreed between them that the dream-scenario should not be openly discussed, that scenario must none the less have been in the back, if not the forefront, of their minds, since it was the only scenario they had, and thus was the only starting-point for their repeated car searches of the New Hampshire countryside.

My use of words 'surely' and 'must' underline the fact that this can only be speculation: but it is essential to appreciate the psychological context in which those searches took place.

Dr Simon himself seems to have recognised that the least improbable alternative was 'that an actual experience had taken place on a sensitised background. A background existed on which could be imprinted illusions or fantasies, later to be re-experienced in dreams.' (Fuller 1966: 190: these appear to be Fuller's words, though based on his interview with Dr Simon)

In considering what might constitute 'a sensitised background' we run up against a crucial issue which divides the proponents of a psychosocial explanation

for the UFO phenomenon from those who find the extraterrestrial hypothesis more probable. (For fuller discussion of these contrasting views, see Clark 1998: 749; Evans 1997; Evans 2001; *Magonia*, passim) Several researchers, notably Méheust, (Méheust 1978; 1985; 1992) and Meurger (Meurger 1995) have demonstrated the pre-conditioning created by the literature of science-fiction, folklore and suchlike cultural influences. Opponents have responded by pointing out that only a negligible fraction of flying saucer witnesses would be likely to have read pre-1939 popular fiction. Yet despite this objection, it seems unquestionable that cultural contamination does indeed take place: this is supported by the fact that there is no aspect of the flying saucer phenomenon which was not foreseen by the American pulps of the 1920s/1930s. (Evans 1993: 4 et seq) It is noteworthy that some of the details of the Hills' encounter - notably the long-nosed, uniform-wearing aliens described by Betty (though not by Barney) - seem closer to *Amazing Stories* than to today's 'greys'.

So, when Dr Simon suggests that 'a background existed' onto which the Hills could impose their own personal encounter, he is not implying any out-of-the-way predisposition, but noting that no one, in America in 1961, could have escaped cultural contamination to the extent of being unaware of the possibility of alien visitation, or without having acquired some subconscious ideas regarding what form the aliens, and any encounter with them, would take. The experiments of Lawson and McCall (Lawson 1983: 8), even though some researchers dispute their conclusions, provide ample demonstration of how firmly the abduction scenario is implanted in the minds of people who claim no interest in the subject, serving as the basis for fantasy 'memories' whose only substance must be what has been more or less subconsciously picked up from their cultural milieu.

Despite his insistence that he was indifferent to UFOs, and that he and Betty had not talked about them for four years previous to their encounter, Barney could hardly have reacted to their sighting as strongly as he did unless he felt he knew what UFOs are and what harm they might do to Betty and himself. His actions in the course of the sighting point not only to a strong awareness of UFOs, but also to a

strong fear - hence his sustained efforts to deny that it was a UFO at all, his determination to hide from Betty that he is scared, his feeling that he must get a weapon.

His fear at the time seems in marked contrast to his subsequent indifference. This indifference may well be, as Karl Pflock has suggested [personal communication], a psychological defence position, adopted to conceal an underlying fear beneath a cloak of rationalisation. None the less it remains a fact that, throughout, it is Betty who takes the initiative - it is she who goes to the library to find Keyhoe's book and who writes to him, it is she who suggests the return trips to the encounter location and so on. Barney is presented as always reluctant, going along with Betty against his own feelings, and dismissing her dreams as nonsense.

Moreover, the dream-scenario is largely, and probably entirely, Betty's handiwork. Her dreams, written up at an unspecified date, are given coherence only when she edits them into a sequential narrative. Her statement 'I will attempt to tell my dreams in chronological order, although they were not dreamed in this way. In fact the first dream told was the last one dreamed,' (Fuller 1966: 333) is extremely significant, for it implies an awareness that the dreams represent a sequence of events, a sequence which adds up to a plausible narrative. This could indicate a subconscious knowledge that the dreams are factual: but equally it could be her subconscious at work, persuading her to impose order on a jumble of dream incidents.

The recall

The most remarkable element in the entire Hill case is that both witnesses, under hypnosis, should recall substantially the same events. But another feature is also worthy of remark: that both Betty and Barney should respond in the same way to hypnosis. Both recall a sequence of events seemingly devoid of fabrication. If they were indeed both recalling true fact, it is remarkable that they should *both* do so, given that most people introduce fantasy into hypnosis. To have one veridical recaller is unusual enough, to have two is remarkable.

On the other hand, if they were both recounting a fantasy, the fact that both narrated the *same* fantasy would be

consistent with psychological experience. Material learnt in one altered state of consciousness can be forgotten in the normal state, but recalled when again in an ASC, as this trivial anecdote illustrates:

An Irish porter to a warehouse, in one of his drunken fits, left a parcel at the wrong house, and when sober could not recollect what he had done with it; but the next time he got drunk, he recollected where he had left it, and went and recovered it. (Macnish 78)

The fact that both the Hills recall substantially the same events, and recall them as lived experience, proves nothing either way: it can be used to support either the veridical or the fantasy hypothesis. Indeed, the same is true of each of the paradoxes presented by their story.

Setting the Hills' adventure alongside other extraordinary experiences does not resolve the matter. However, it enables us to see that there exists in every one of us a faculty for mythmaking - that is, combining material derived from the individual's cultural framework with other material with personal content, to create an authorised yet made-to-measure myth. Each of us, given the appropriate circumstances, could find ourselves living a fantasy with the total conviction that we are really experiencing the events we are actually imagining, or recalling imagined experiences with such vividness that we are convinced they took place in reality.

Is this what happened to the Hills? We cannot say for sure, and perhaps we never will be able to say. But at least, by seeing their story alongside other stories, we can see that the dream-fantasy scenario envisaged by Dr Simon is a possible one.

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